

VZCZCXRO5904

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHSL #0021/01 0111734
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 111734Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0588
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000021

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: ARCHBISHOP PRAISES FASCIST WHILE NATIONAL MEMORY
INSTITUTE FLOUNDERS

REF: A. 06 BRATISLAVA 964

- [1](#)B. 06 BRATISLAVA 977
- [1](#)C. 06 BRATISLAVA 862
- [1](#)D. 06 BRATISLAVA 719
- [1](#)E. 06 BRATISLAVA 586
- [1](#)F. 06 BRATISLAVA 830

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Slovak Prime Minister and President publicly refuted the statements (although not the person) of Slovak Archbishop Jan Sokol in praise of a WWII era fascist leader which had outraged local minority groups and received international media attention. Despite the PM's repudiation of the wartime fascist Slovak state and his call for an independent historian to head the country's Institute of National Memory (UPN), coalition partner SNS (Slovak National Party) continues to float names of far right nationalists as candidates for the job. The beleaguered UPN has suffered several other attacks on its credibility and mandate. Choosing an appropriate candidate as its Chairman could prove a litmus test of how far to the right the socialist Prime Minister will bend in his horse trading with coalition partners. We have made clear to government officials the harm the publicity Sokol and such views cause -- including in the U.S. -- to Slovakia's image. Our criticism and that of others may have helped disqualify some rumored candidates for the UPN Chairmanship. END SUMMARY.

ARCHBISHOP OUTRAGES WITH PRAISE OF FASCIST...

[1](#)2. (U) Slovak Catholic Archbishop Jan Sokol of the Bratislava-Trnava diocese praised Father Jozef Tiso, the WWII-era leader of the Slovak fascist state which deported tens of thousands of Slovak Jews, Roma, and others to their deaths in German concentration camps. Tiso was executed as a war criminal in 1947. During an interview on the Slovak news channel TA3 on December 27, Sokol said he respected Tiso as the leader of wartime Slovakia. He went on to say that Slovakia had been a poor country which experienced prosperity under Tiso. Sokol offered this opinion in response to a question about whether Tiso should be beatified as recommended in a new biography, which is currently a bestseller at Matica Slovenska (ref A), an organization with a nationalist bent that was established to promote Slovak culture. (NOTE: In a round-about answer, Sokol eventually opined that Tiso, as a politician, should not receive beatification but that the decision belongs to the Vatican. END NOTE.) Given an opportunity to explain and revise his stance, Sokol instead defended his statements on January 3, noting that he had offered his personal opinion during the interview.

[1](#)3. (U) Slovak Jewish and Romani groups were outraged. A small group of left-wing intellectuals presented a petition to the Slovak Bishops Conference to distance itself from

Sokol's statements. The Bishop's conference responded that the subject was a matter for historians and the Archbishop had a right to his personal opinion. The Slovak media widely broadcast the story, which was also picked up by international media outlets.

¶4. (SBU) In response, Prime Minister Robert Fico, while not condemning or mentioning Sokol by name, publicly stated on two different occasions that the wartime Slovak state was fascist and that Tiso was responsible for the deportation of Slovaks to concentration camps. One of Fico's advisors privately acknowledged that Fico felt he could not directly criticize the Archbishop due to domestic political reasons. President Ivan Gasparovic told the media that he does not agree with Sokol's statements about Tiso. Opposition politicians remained quiet on the matter. Jan Slota, the head of SNS, ambiguously said that both positive and negative events occurred in wartime Slovakia.

...WHILE NAT'L MEMORY INST SUFFERS SETBACKS

¶5. (U) Meanwhile, the Institute of National Memory (UPN) (refs B-E), mandated by parliament in 2003 to preserve and publish the secret government files from Slovakia's two former totalitarian regimes (fascist and communist) from 1939-1989, has suffered several setbacks at the hands of the government since the death of founding Chairman Jan Langos in a car accident last June.

¶6. (SBU) On December 21, the Kosice municipal police announced that Langos himself was responsible for the fatal car crash because he was speeding. Despite the fact that Langos was well-known to speed when driving, the conclusion that he was solely responsible for the accident is puzzling

BRATISLAVA 00000021 002 OF 002

since Langos had the right-of-way on a highway when a large construction vehicle pulled out in front of him from a small side road. It is also surprising that the announcement of the results of the investigation was handled by an assistant spokesperson for a municipal police unit. Langos was a respected public figure, having been a dissident during communism, a leader of the Velvet Revolution, Minister of Interior for the post-communist Czechoslovak Federation under Vaclav Havel, and head of the democratic party in Slovakia. Such a person would normally merit higher-ranking coverage.

¶7. (U) On January 1, PM Fico spoke critically about Langos to reporters at the presentation of a government award to a person who, according to UPN files, had been agent of the communist Slovak secret police. Fico said that he did not trust a word Langos had said and accused the UPN of manipulating the files in its archives.

¶8. (U) On January 3, UPN received a notice in the mail that the Minister of Justice Stefan Harabin (ref F) ordered the institution out of its current offices within the next six months. The office building, which has been modified to include many document protection features, belongs to the Justice Ministry, which supposedly needs the office space for regional and district courts. Deputy Prime Minister Dusan Caplovic, who said he was "shocked" by the eviction notice, expressed his support for the UPN and criticized Harabin's method of communication. After a January 8 meeting between Caplovic and Harabin, the two announced that UPN will not be evicted strictly after six months and they will look for other options, including alternative office space for UPN and/or the courts.

...GOS MULLS SUPPORTER OF FASCISM FOR HIGH PROFILE POST

¶9. (SBU) Fico stated on January 8 that the position of UPN

Chairman should be filled by a historian unaffected by ideology. He noted that the governing coalition council had decided upon a nominee, but would not release the name at that time. By January 9, press reports indicated that the nominee would be a member of the extreme right Slovak People's Party (SLS), which patterns itself after the fascist political party from the wartime state. The alleged nominee, Peter Mulik, had also previously published an article lauding the achievements of WWII-era Slovakia. By agreement within the governing coalition (Smer, SNS, Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)), SNS has the right to nominate the coalition's choice for UPN Chairman. However, the other coalition partners must agree, and the Chairman must be approved by a parliamentary majority. By January 10, advisors for the PM and Deputy PM -- responding in part to our criticism -- indicated that a different nominee would be sought. On January 11, Slota denied that SNS intended to nominate Mulik.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Though they have their own nationalistic leanings, the PM and President reacted with appropriate public disdain for the Archbishop's comments. Having long-since chosen a nationalist coalition partner, it is not yet clear how far the PM will bend to SNS or to his own party's nationalist wing when it comes to the details of political horse trading.

By repudiating the wartime Slovak state, Fico demonstrated that there is a line to the far right that he will not cross.

The eventual UPN Chairman could prove a litmus test as to how far to the right this line stands. However, Fico's thin staff and almost exclusive focus on the domestic environment leaves him unprepared for international criticism. Despite the coalition agreement that SNS will choose the coalition's candidate, Fico will have final say on the choice, as he does on all coalition decisions. Calling for an independent historian -- after the post has remained vacant for seven months -- is a step in the right direction, but one which has not yet seen appropriate follow-through. We will continue to engage the GOS on the importance of the UPN and its positive role in looking honestly at the country's fascist and communist histories. We have approached like-minded European embassies, some of which have also raised similar concerns with Slovak decision-makers.

VALLEE